Thoughts on Christmas. By Rev. Dr. T. De Witt Talmage.

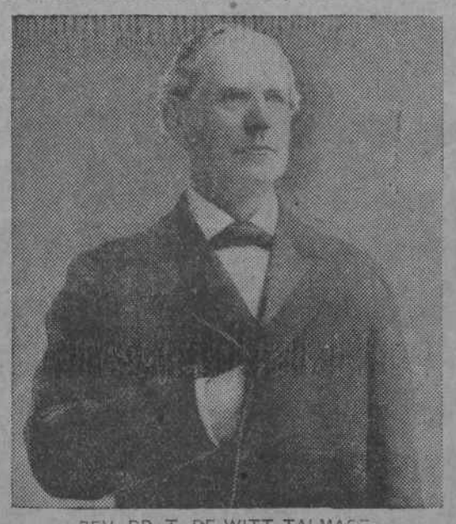
TWO plain people, centuries ago, hoteled in a village barn after a walk of eighty miles. Too long a trudge for one in poor health. No lords of State awaiting in antechamber as when other kings are born. No messenger mounted at the doorway ready to herald the advent from city to city. No medical skill in attendance. No satin-lined cradle to receive the infantile guest. But a monarch born in the hostelry, called the house of Chim Ham; the night with diamond finger pointing down to the place; the door of heaven set wide open to look out; from orchestral batons of light dripping the oratorios of the Messiah; on lowest doorstep of heaven the minstrels of God discoursing of glory and good will. Soon after the white-bearded astrologists kneel, and from leathern pouch clink the shekels and from open sacks exhale the frankincense and rustle out the bundles of myrrh. The loosened star, the escaped doxology of celestials, the chill December night aflush with May morn, our world a lost star, and another star rushing down the sky that night to beckon the wanderer home again, shall yet make all nations keep Christmas.

The unusual appearance that night may have been a strange conjunction of worlds. As the transit of Venus in our day was foretold many years ago by astronomers, and astronomers can tell what will be the conjunction of worlds a thousand years from now, so they can calculate backward, and even infidel astronomers have been compelled to testify that about the year one there was a very unusual appearance in the heavens. The Chinese record, of course, entirely independent of the Bible, gives as a matter of history that about the year one there was a strange and unaccountable appearance in the heavens. But it may have been a meteor such as you and I have seen flash in the horizon.

Only a few nights ago I saw in the northern sky a star shoot and fall with such brilliancy and precision that if I had been on a hill as high as that of Bethlehem, on which the shepherds stood, I could have marked within a short distance the place of the alighting. The University of Iowa and the British Museum have specimens of meteoric stones picked up in the fields, fragments flung off from other worlds, leaving a fiery trail on the sky. So that it is not to me at all improbable that the stellar or the meteoric appearance on that night of which I write can be accounted for scientifically. I only care to know that it was bright, that it was silvery, that it flashed and swayed and swung and halted with joy celestial, as though Christ in haste to save our world had rushed down without His Coronet and the angels of God had hurled it after Him.

But this scene also impresses me with the fact that the wise men of the East came to Christ. They were not fools, they were not imbeciles. The record distinctly says that the wise men came to Christ. We say they were the magi, or they were the alchemists, or they were the astrologists, and we say it with depreciating accentuation. Why, they were the most splendid and magnificent men of the century. They were the naturalists and the scientists. They knew all that was known. You must remember that astrology was the mother of astronomy, and that alchemy was the mother of chemistry, and because children may be brighter than the mothers you do not despise the mothers. It was the lifelong business of these astrologers to study the stars. Twenty-two hundred and fifty years before Christ was born the wise men knew the procession of the equinoxes, and they had calculated the orbit and the return of the comets. Professor Smith declares that he thinks they understood the distance of the sun from the earth. We find in the book of Job that the men of olden time did not suppose the world was flat, as some have said, but that he knew and the men of his time knew the world was globular. The pyramids were built for astrological and astronomical study.

Then the alchemists spent their lives in the study of metals and gases and liquids and solids, and in filling the world's library with their wonderful discoveries; they were vastly wise men who came to the East. They understood embalming as our most scientific men cannot understand it. After this world has gone on studying hundreds of years it may come up to the point where the ancients began to forget. I believe the lost arts are as mighty as the living arts. They were wise men that came from the East, and tradition says the three wisest came—Caspar, a young man; Balthazar, a man in mid-life, and Melchior, an octogenarian—the three wisest men of al lthe century. They came to the manger. So it has always been—the wisest men come to Christ, the brainiest men



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come to the manger. Who was the greatest metaphysician this country ever has produced? Jonathan Edwards, the Christian. Who was the greatest astronomer of his age? Herschel, the Christian. Who was the greatest poet ever produced? John Milton, the Christian. Who was the wisest writer on law? Blackstone, the Christian. Who was the mightiest intellect in Great Britain? Gladstone, the Christian. Why is it that every college and university in the land has a chapel? Because they must have a place for the wise men to worship.

I know also in this scene that it was a Winter month that God chose for His Son's nativity. Had it been the month of May—that is the season of blossoms. Had He been born in the month of June—that is the season of roses. Had He been born in the month of July—that is the season of great harvest. Had He been born in the month of September—that is the season of ripe orchards. Had He been born in the month of October—that is the season of upholstered forests. But he was born in the month of December, when there are no flowers blooming out of doors, and when all the harvests that have not bee ngathered have perished, and when there are no fruits ripening on the hill and when the leaves are drifted over the bare earth.

It was in closing December that He Was born to show that this is a Christ for people in sharp blast; for people under clouded sky; for people with frosted hopes; for people with the thermometer below zero; for people snowed under.

That is the reason He is so often found among the destitute. You can find Him on any night coming off the moors. You can see Him any night coming through the dark lanes of the city. You can see Him putting His hand under the fainting head in the pauper's cabin. He remembers how the wind whistled around the caravansary in Bethlehem that December night, and He is in sympathy with all those who in their poverty hear the shutters clatter on a cold night. It was this December Christ that Washington and his army worshipped at Valley Forge when without blankets they lay down in the December snow. It was this Christ that the Pilgrim Fathers appealed to when the Mayflower wharfed at Plymouth Rock, and in the years that went by the graves digged were more in number than the houses built. Oh, I tell you, we want a December Christ, not a Christ for fair weather, but a Christ for dark days, clouded with sickness and chilling with disappointment and suffering with bereavement and terrific with wide open graves. Not a Springtime Christ, not a Summer Christ, not an Autumnal Christ, but a Winter Christ. Oh, this suffering and struggling world needs to be hushed and soothed and rocked and lullabied in the arms of sympathetic Omnipotence. No mother ever with more tenderness put her foot on the rocker of the cradle of a sick child than Christ comes down to us, to this invalid world and He rocks it in placidity and quietness as He says, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

To all sufferers in this Christmastide I commend a December Christ. Notice also a fact which no one seems to notice, that this Christ was born among the sheep and the cattle and the horses and the camels in order that He might be an alleviating influence to the whole animal creation. It means mercy for overdriven, underfed, poorly sheltered, galled and maltreated animal creation. Hath the Christ who compared Himself to a dove no care for the cruelties of the pigeon shooting? Hath the Christ who compared Himself to a lamb no care for the sheep that are tied and contorted and with neck over the sharp edge of the butcher's cart, or the cattle train in hot weather from Omaha to New York with no water—fifteen hundred miles of agony? Hath the Christ whose tax was paid by a fish, the coin taken from its mouth, no care for the tossing fins in the fish market? Hath the Christ who strung with His own hands the nerves of dog and cat no indignation for the horrors of vivisection? Hath the Christ who said, "Go to the ant," no watchfulness for the transfixed insects? Hath the Christ who said, "Behold the fowl of the air," Himself never beheld the outrages heaped upon the brute creation which cannot articulate its grief? This Christ came not only to lift the human race out of its trouble, but to lift out of pang and hardship the animal creation.

In the glorious millennial time the child shall lead the lion and play with the cockatrice only because brute and reptile shall have no more wrongs to avenge. To alleviate the condition of the brute creation Christ was born in the cattle pen. The first bleat of the Lamb of God heard amid the tired flocks of Bethlehem shepherds! The white horse of eternal victory stabled in a barn!

Practical Christmas Charity By John W. Keller,

Commissioner of Public Charities.

CHRISTMAS charity may be indiscriminate without being harmful. As a general proposition, indiscriminate giving undoubtedly does injury to the community; but at Christmas time there is a spirit in the air that makes it possible for even the worthless among the needy to receive gifts without injury to themselves. The acceptance of a Christmas gift leaves the recipient more kindly disposed toward the rest of the world and better satisfied with himself. Christmas charity elevates its recipient as well as its bestower. Each becomes the better for it. Left to himself at this season of general rejoicing, a man becomes bitter; and if any criminal instincts lie dormant in him nothing will so quickly bring them to life as to feel himself cold and hungry and neglected when other people are making merry.

There is only one form of charity that is more admirable than Christmas charity, and that is the charity that springs up when the poor are suddenly confronted by want in great crises. I mean such charity, for example, as that which came through the Journal a couple of winters ago, and through private subscription placed in my hands last Winter, when the poor were put to such terrible suffering by the blizzard; or the year before that, when the hard times and the hard Winter combined to bring death by cold and starvation to the doors of thousands of deserving families. To investigate applicants at such time is little short of criminal, and I have absolutely no sympathy with the covert attacks that were made at that time on the Journal's charity fund, which alleviated suffering without demanding a certificate of character. Under such circumstances, to give quickly is to give twice.

And so it is on Christmas Day. Of course, as we only have a certain amount of money that we are prepared to devote to charity, we should even on such an occasion of general good will use our judgment, and discriminate if possible in favor of the deserving. But if some of our good things were to go to the undeserving no great harm would ensue. It has long ago been said that a bad man or a bad woman is never quite so bad when his or her stomach is full and there is a blazing hearth as when the larder is empty and the grate is cold. Somehow, crime—that is, petty, vicious, low crime, the crime that is most general and most degrading to society—does not flourish so well when the people are comfortable as when they lack comfort. All experience teaches that we may give on Christmas with a free hand and an open heart, and close our ears to the remonstrances of the sociological students.

As to the character of our gifts, they may take any form that would be most acceptable to the recipients. It is probably not wise to give money outright if it can be avoided, for generally the people who have so little money that they need charity are not good stewards, and will not be able to make it go as far or handle it as wisely as those who are more fortunately situated, and who can judge of the situation from aloof. But if a man or a woman who wants to give on Christmas Day has not the time or the inclination to investigate what his or her neighbors need most, let them by all means give money rather than give

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nothing. Some of this money may be used for drink—it probably will be—but even the drunkard is more mellow and gentle on the Lord's Birthday, and he will spare some of the fund which otherwise would go entirely for alcohol to the betterment of his family. It would be a liberal education to many of our good people to go among the poor—even the depraved poor if you will—on Christmas Day. They will observe that the influence of the occasion is almost as strong, if not a little stronger, than it is with those who eat their Christmas dinners in well-ordered, luxuriously furnished dining rooms, where the Winter's sun pours through the windows and is reflected in cut glass and burnished silver. The station house blotter—that church register of the congested districts—will bear out this statement. It will be seen that on Christmas day there are fewer arrests for violence than on any other day of the year.

But by all means, where such a thing is possible, give what money will buy, rather than money itself. There can be no such Christmas gift in all the world as the payment of the back rent for a distressed family that must face a night on the street with bag and baggage except for such aid. Add to this a big hamper of good, healthy, nourishing food, with a few luxuries thrown in, a warm frock for the mother and babies, and perhaps an old suit of clothes for the father; put enough coal in the cellar to keep the family warm for a few weeks, and you have followed the teaching of the Master, whose tenderest thought was for the poor. Of course, it is only the comparatively wealthy or well-to-do who can give on such a scale. But all of us can give something, and surely we can find objects for our gifts on every hand. A half hour spent in the tenement-house district on the East or West Side will bring to our view hundreds of people to whom the slightest token from our hands will mean sunshine and gladness on Christmas Day. A bottle of wine to some poor invalid who needs stimulation as well as nourishment; a collection of toys, no matter how battered and worn, to the children of a father who has been out of work; some clothing, even if it is only a pair of socks; food that will be a little out of the ordinary—something tasty if possible; a package of tobacco, fruit—almost everything in this line will find a warm welcome and make good friends.

Persons who do not wish to present their gifts in person, or who misdoubt their own judgment, will find in the Charity Organization Society an admirable almoner. Any presents distributed through this organization, it may be relied on, will bring gladness and the spirit of Christmas Day where they are most needed. A note sent to the office of the society, Twenty-second street and Fourth avenue, will bring a responsible agent.

The city, as is perhaps not generally known, has no power to dispense outdoor charity. The responsibilities, therefore, for seeing that the poor get their share of the blessings of Christmas Day rests entirely with the individual. He should see to it that he meets this responsibility. Let him give, discriminately or indiscriminately, it makes little difference, but let him give what he can, remembering that it is the anniversary of the birth of the blessed Christ, and that it is the best day for a good deed.

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Christmas Uncritically Considered By Edgar Saltus.

CHRISTMAS comes but once a year. But in what year did it first come? And why, now, in coming, has it selected the 25th of December? To these problems the Gospels give no clew. And naturally. Christmas is not a Christian festival.

On the early calendar of the early Church Christmas was a movable feast, which was celebrated sometimes in January, sometimes in May. The date, wholly arbitrary, on which it now falls is the result of an ecclesiastical council instituted by a forgotten Pope whose decision contemporaneous and subsequent theologians vehemently disputed.

But no matter about that. "Unto the Christian," said St. Chrysostom, "the whole of time is a festival, because of the excellence of the things bestowed." And so a fig for the date. The point is elsewhere.

In Norseland, among the divinities of long ago, was Odin. In the youth of the world the youth of the year was dedicated to him. Annually in his honor a festival was held at Upsal. It was a feast of joy, a welcome to nature born in Winter's arms. It was called Jul. From Jul comes Yule, the old English term for Christmas.

Thoroughly pagan, it was not for that less healthy. Through processions of centuries of which chronology has no record it endured, and in enduring it passed from Upsal to Rome. In changing its habitation it changed its name. Rome knew it as the Saturnalia. It was there that Christianity found it, and, as was the case with many other local customs, found, too, that it appealed. Joy at the birth of nature was replaced with joy at the birth of Our Lord. To the old rite the new Church gave a fresh beauty and a higher significance. In beauty and significance it has been expanding ever since.

Ecclesiastically and briefly such is the history of Christmas. Interconnected with it are two customs—the giving of kisses and the giving of gifts. These observances are, of course, old as the hills, but there are students who derive them both from the Druids. Of the latter we know so little that it is idle to attempt to know less. The only quotable person who enjoyed so much as a bowing acquaintance with them was Caesar. In the story which he left the mistletoe figures. In the story of every Christmas it ought to figure still.

But we will come to that in a minute. Concerning gifts, it has been authoritatively asserted that it is more blessed to give than to receive. That was in the good old days. Times have changed since then and values with them. Nowadays it is still held to be more blessed to give than to receive, yet only opinions and general advice.

Concerning kissing, a fair give and take is in certain circumstances rumored to be very agreeable. It is curious, though, how with recurrence the pleasure of it wanes. That which has seemed blissfuller than any bloom of bliss will through mere repetition become sufficiently stupid to bore an artesian well.

This effect the virtue of the mistletoe prevented. It sanctioned a lawless give and even a take, but only once a twelvemonth. Thus was satiety avoided and recuperation insured. As a tonic the mistletoe was, therefore, highly efficacious, and yet as a sedative its properties were more advantageous still.

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But let us get under a bough of it and watch those properties at work. There an ingenue, pretty as a peach and sometimes quite as witty, inviolate as a vestal and much better dressed, a girl rendered by precept, example and long educational processes as afraid of a kiss as of a bee, may, unrebuked, unashamed and applauded, surrender the silk of her lips. That which otherwise would precipitate a scandal the sedative and perhaps antiseptic properties of the mistletoe transform into a parlor game. The Druids were great old chaps.

The custom, however, like others less savorous, indeed, yet quite as significant, has within the memory of the present generation become obsolescent, and promises ultimately to become obsolete. More is the pity, too. It is nicer no doubt to kiss unobserved. But when the party of the second part objects—as all decorous young parties of the second part ought to—there was on Christmas and on Christmas Eve a good deal of satisfaction in being lawfully authorized to lure her beneath a chandelier and embrace her there, as Blackstone has it willynilly. It gave a flavor to the plum pudding and left no after fatigue whatever.

Every dog cart has its day. Precisely as the Yule has been forgot and the Saturnalia has subsided so is this charming little folly departing. But the giving of gifts remains, and will remain so long as there are children, big and little. For that is not a mere folly. Originally, like kissing, a religious observance, latterly and locally it has developed into a tax. There is modern progress.

Christmas, too, has altered. In religious communities the ceremonies connected with it are in point of poetry and elevation more beautiful than before. In fashionable centres it has been reduced to the level of a holiday. Centuries ago at the approach of the Saturnalia the rich of Rome went out to their manors in the country and their villas on the sea. To-day, at the same season, the rich of New York do likewise.

That is not progress. Christmas should represent more than a holiday and a change of air. Of all feasts, it is the most inspiring. In significance it is emblematic, in suggestiveness unexcelled. Study its meaning and you learn the inutility of blame and approval, of hate and fear; you learn, too, that there is something higher than our will, that we are ruled, not rulers, and that yet, when conjecture has ceased and life no longer perplexes, when wonderment is dispersed and the end is come, that then, afar and beyond, somewhere to pleasure us, there may be landscapes the color of emerald, where gifts are free, where kisses are eternal, where the mistletoe is perennial and where dreams come true.

There is a prospect which neither the Jul nor the Saturnalia could provide. Odin received only those who had died in a fight. Valhalla was a hall in which heroes did each other up by day and at night drank mead from their enemies' skulls. In the Saturnalia a sin was a prayer. The Pantheon from which the initial ceremonies proceeded was a menagerie of gods whose rites were unclean.

Both festivals were feasts of joy. In ascending through the ages from them only joy has Christmas retained. Now that it is coming once again, may that joy be yours and the day itself right merry.

EDGAR SALTUS.

My 63rd Christmas in New York By Parke Godwin.

MY reminiscences of New York go back some sixty-three years. Perhaps they go back further, because in the year 1825—seventy-four years ago—I was sent to New York to school from Paterson, N. J., where I was born in 1816. This school was in a garret on the third floor of a building which stood at the corner of Reade and Broadway. The master's name? I forget it.

But I have passed through sixty-three Christmases in New York.

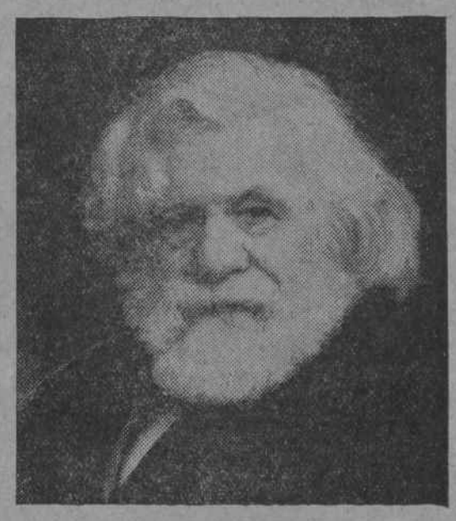
In those early days Christmas was not much of a holiday. We were all New Englanders or Dutchmen, and, of course, decidedly Protestant, and did not like to give prominence to a festival which seemed to have been Catholic in its origin. Yet we had our dinner on that day, always consisting of turkey and cranberry sauce, and in the evening the young folks indulged in those mysterious rites peculiar to young folks when they are walking home in the twilight.

New Year's was then the great day—the day of universal calling. By 10 o'clock in the morning the ladies prepared to receive in their best dresses and with their sweetest smiles. I remember that one New Year's I had about 150 names on my list, and I managed before 10 o'clock at night to get through with them all. As it was the custom at each house to present a little refreshment, it happened that many of us did not get through at all, but retired early in the afternoon.

At the time I first went to school in New York the city had but one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, and its northern limit was Canal street, so named from a stream which ran through it from a great pond to the river. It was crossed by an old stone bridge, beyond which were a few residences, farm houses and orchards, or the woods. We boys never passed that bridge, because we believed, as we had been told, that the Red Indian still wandered there with his scalping knife and tomahawk; or, if not he, a no less formidable bugaboo, the Press Gang, which were in the habit of seizing children and carrying them off to sea.

As there was no sewerage, epidemics, especially the yellow fever, were frequent; and the well-to-do took refuge in the country, that is, in Greenwich village. The fashionable part of town was, first, the Battery, and afterward the City Hall Park, where people walked and chatted, and, later in the evening, lovers whispered sweet nonsense. At that time there was still on this side of Canal street a great stretch of meadow, named the Lispenard Meadows, after an old Frenchman, who gave his name also to the present Lispenard street.

There were no uniformed police—only constables—veritable Dogberries—of whom Jacob Hayes was chief. The introduction of uniformed police was very strongly opposed by several of the newspapers and many citizens, on the ground that it was not desirable that



PARKE GODWIN

malefactors know who their enemies were. But the success of the metropolitan police in England under Sir Robert Peel soon dissipated these objections.

There was then but one theatre in the city, the old Park, where the elder Keene, the elder Booth, George Frederick Cooke, now buried in Trinity Churchyard; Macready, Ellen Tree, Kendall and his wonderful daughter used to appear—all of whom I saw but the first. The Park was soon followed by a theatre on the Bowery which is still standing, and then by a theatre in Chatham street, which was bought by the religious public and where the great religious meetings were held. It was there that the first Abolition riots took place, when the Abolitionists, with William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, undertook to discuss the question of slavery.

In those early days there were but four daily newspapers—the Evening Post, edited by William Cullen Bryant; the Commercial Advertiser, edited by William L. Stone; the Standard, edited by John I. Mumford, and the Courier and Enquirer, edited by James Watson Webb, father of the existing numerous family of Webbs. As to the circulation of these journals, I think it reached into the hundreds, but seldom into the thousands. One of them, I remember, announced that it had the enormous sale of five thousand copies a day, but the story was generally disbelieved, because it was doubted that any machinery then in use was equal to the delivery of so prodigious a number in a single day.

The journals then got their foreign news, which was once in a fortnight, from the pilots who boarded incoming vessels in the lower bay. Their news from Albany was generally two days in coming; the news from Washington several days, until one of the enterprising editors established a pony express between this city and Washington.

Society in those days was composed of few persons. There were so few people of social turn in those days that everybody seemed to know everybody else, but the leading families then were the Livingstons, the Joralemons, the Costers, the Delafields and others.

The principal hotels were the City Hotel, where the important dances and assemblies were held, and the Washington Hotel, at the corner of Broadway and Chambers street, where Stewart's wholesale store was afterward erected. The latter was the headquarters of the bloods of the city, where most of the dissipation and particularly the gambling was carried on. The favorite drive of the fast young people was, first, to Captain Thompson's, at the corner of Broadway and Twenty-third street; afterward to a hostelry in Harlem conducted by Cato, who was a famous caterer. Every young fellow of means then liked to have his fast pacing or trotting horses. Horses indeed were great favorites with everybody, and one of the most universal excitements that ever occurred in the city was at the race on the Union course, near Jamaica Long Island, between Sir Henry and Eclipse, Sir Henry a Southern horse and Eclipse a Northern.

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